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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**South Dakota Air National Guard command post controller follows family tradition**

*by Staff Sgt. Don Branum  
332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs*

**JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq** -- When a command post controller with the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing here answered her nation's call by joining the Air National Guard in 2004, she also upheld her family's proud tradition of military service.

Senior Airman Elizabeth Ross is both an ANG Airman and the daughter of an ANG Airman. Her work on duty and as a volunteer reflects her heartfelt commitment to serve her country.

"I felt that joining the Air Force was something I needed to do as a citizen," said Airman Ross, who is deployed from the South Dakota ANG's 114th Fighter Wing.

She wasn't initially interested in joining, choosing instead to go to the University of Minnesota after high school. But after she graduated, earning a bachelor's degree in child psychology and sociology, she decided to enlist.

"I joined in my own time," she said. "My father had tried to get me to join all along."

When she did make the decision, it caught her father, retired Master Sgt. Blaine Ross, slightly off guard.

"He thought that because I had finished college, that I had moved past my interest in it," she said, "but he was very supportive of my decision and happy that I finally joined."

Two of Airman Ross' three sisters also followed their father's example: 1st Lt. Laurie Ross is a protocol officer deployed to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, from the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C. One of her younger stepsisters, 2nd Lt. Brittany Brewer, is an intelligence officer at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, and is tasked

to deploy later this year.

Since joining, Airman Ross has remained on active-duty status. The Guard's command post controllers are always in high demand to respond to natural disasters and other missions within the United States, she said.

"It seems like there's always some disaster that requires a command post controller," she added.

One such natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina, ravaged New Orleans in August 2005. Airman Ross' first temporary duty assignment took her to the National Guard Bureau as part of its crisis action team for Hurricane Katrina relief.

"I was an airman first class right out of technical school," she said. "It took a while longer for me to go because I hadn't even been issued my travel card yet -- that's how green I was," she said, smiling.

Her job there was to track assets from different states that were supporting the relief efforts in New Orleans so senior Guard leaders would have an accurate sight picture of what resources were coming from each unit.

"At times it was overwhelming, but I learned so much so quickly," she said. "The experience was invaluable. I feel like I can deploy into any situation, do my job and do it effectively."

When the crisis action team stood down, Airman Ross returned to her hometown of Sioux Falls, S.D., to provide home-base support for Operation Jump Start, the federal government's effort to secure the U.S.-Mexico border. Later, when her leaders at the 114th FW asked for volunteers to deploy in support of the Global War on Terrorism, she raised her hand.

"Volunteering is the only way (Guardsmen) can come over here," she said. "I felt it was a good time to deploy -- it's right before I start my nursing degree, and I don't want to go through my entire career without doing anything or going anywhere."

Deploying to the busiest single airfield in the Department of Defense required some adjustment. Flight following -- tracking inbound and outbound air traffic and coordinating ground support -- is a task that command post controllers at Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls don't perform. In contrast, command post controllers at Joint Base Balad follow an average of 50 flights per day.

Airman Ross has taken on the additional responsibilities with aplomb.

"She's a stellar controller -- always motivated, always eager to learn and always raising the bar," said Capt. Rodney Silva, the 332nd AEW Command Post chief. "She's forthright, she's honest, and she upholds standards the way everyone in the Air Force

should."

Command post controllers have to maintain constant situational awareness, Silva said. They have to coordinate operations among the Tanker Airlift Control Center at Scott AFB, Ill., the Air Mobility Division in Southwest Asia, and the Transient Alert and Air Terminal Operations Center here. They also have to be ready to respond to indirect fire attacks, fires and other incidents on base.

"It's interesting to go from the peacetime perspective, with the unit readiness exercises and the operational readiness inspections, to a wartime environment where you're using the skills you've always practiced," said Ross.

Airman Ross will begin taking classes toward her nursing degree through the University of South Dakota shortly before she returns from her deployment. She volunteers at the Air Force Theater Hospital, both to help the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group staff and to learn more about the job.

"She's always focused, always learning," said Capt. Silva. "Instead of just performing tasks, she's always aware. Airman Ross took charge and saw her projects come to fruition -- this deployment rotation was lucky to have her."

Once she earns her second degree, Airman Ross said she plans to apply for an Air Force commission and continue her military career until she retires -- a continuing testament to her family's commitment to serve.

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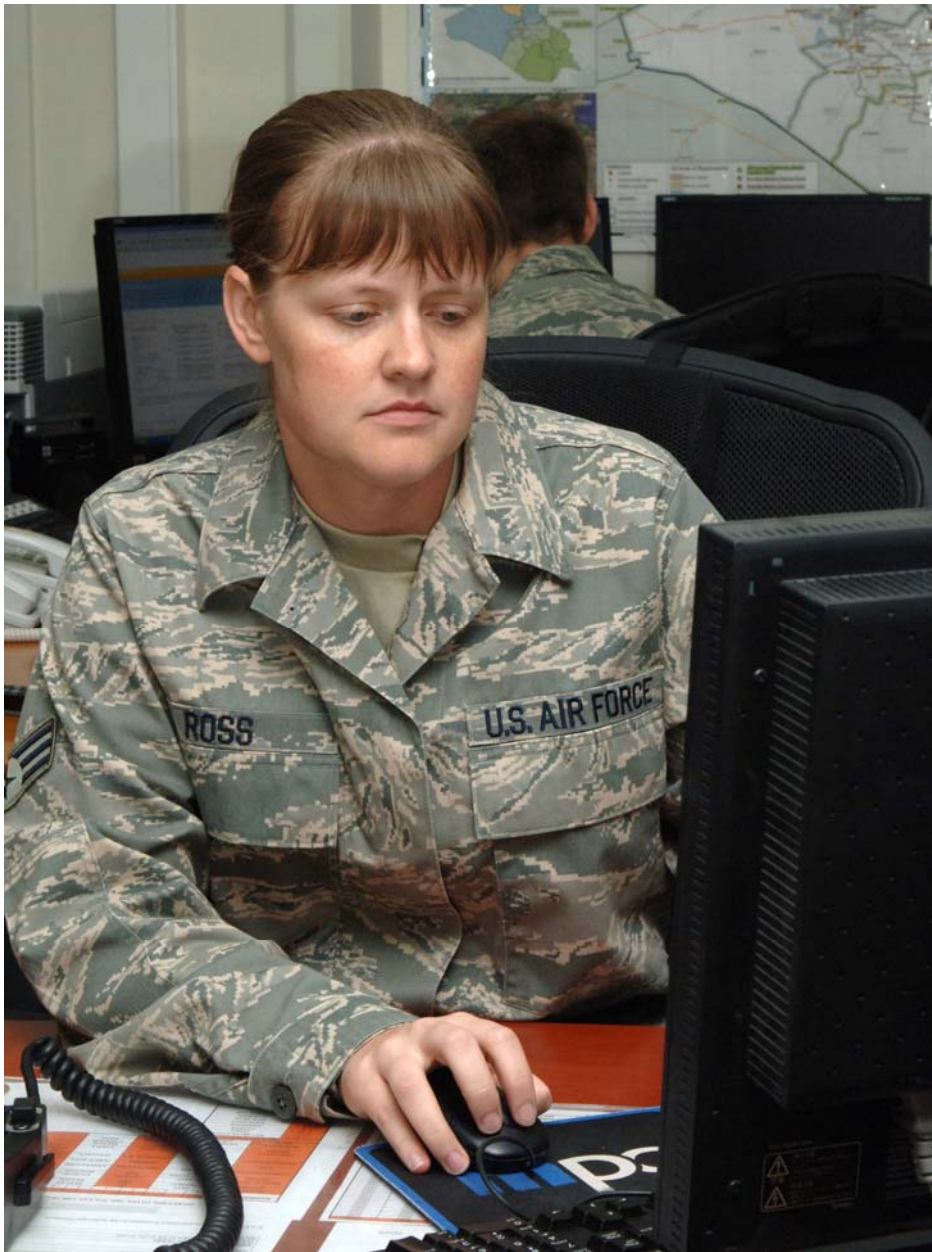
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Photo Cut Lines:



**080819-F-3188G-006** - JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq -- Senior Airman Elizabeth Ross conducts flight following at the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Command Post here Aug. 19. Flight following consists of tracking all inbound and outbound aircraft and coordinating ground support. Ross, a command and control journeyman, is deployed from the South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Fighter Wing. Her hometown is Sioux Falls, S.D. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Erik Gudmundson)

Link to photo: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/released/080819-F-3188G-006.jpg>



**080820-F-3188G-001** - JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq -- Senior Airman Elizabeth Ross conducts flight following at the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Command Post here Aug. 19. Flight following consists of tracking all inbound and outbound aircraft and coordinating ground support. Ross, a command and control journeyman, is deployed from the South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Fighter Wing. Her hometown is Sioux Falls, S.D. (U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Erik Gudmundson)

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**NOTE:** Since the terrorist attacks on America, the South Dakota National Guard has mobilized more than 3,100 Soldiers and 1,000 Airmen in support of the Global War on Terror.

Currently, more than 550 Soldiers and Airmen from the South Dakota National Guard remain on duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations throughout Southwest Asia. More than 3,600 National Guardsmen are available in South Dakota to provide support for state and national emergencies and homeland defense.